DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 118 872 CE 006 418

TITLE [Myths and Realities of Life for Older Americans.]
INSTITUTION National Council on the Aging, Inc., Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Apr 75
NOTE 28p.; Material contained herein has been excerpted from "The Myth and Reality of Aging in America" a study for the National Council on the Aging, Inc., (c) April 1975, by Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.; (Available as CE 006 417)
JOURNAL CIT Perspective on Aging; v4 n2 Mar/Apr75

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Ability; Attitudes; Cultural Images; Demography; Expectation; Experience; *National Surveys; Needs; *Older Adults; Productivity; Public Facilities; *Public Opinion; Public Policy; Retirement; *Self Concept; Senior Citizens; Social Responsibility; Social Welfare; *Statistical Studies; Stereotypes
IDENTIFIERS National Council on the Aging Inc; Social Security

ABSTRACT

The document is comprised of brief excerpts from the Louis Harris and Associates' study for the National Council on the Aging, "The Myth and Reality of Aging in America," the most extensive study ever conducted to determine public attitudes and perceptions of aging in this country, and to document older Americans' views and attitudes toward themselves and the experience of old age. Topics to which excerpts are devoted include: old age and public attitudes, preparation for old age, the survey advisory committee, the experience of being old, community involvement, the image of aging, the politics of old age, the media's portrayal, and the level of service by older adults. One finding in the area of public policy is considered to be extremely significant: 97 percent of Americans believe that Social Security payments should automatically increase with rises in the cost of living; also, the conclusion is drawn that most of the older population wish to be productive and have the potential to be so, and clearly, too, most older people feel that their condition in life is better than the general public believes it to be. Nevertheless, many millions of older people are living at, or below, the poverty line. (Author/AJ)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

25

Vol. IV, No. 2 • March/April 1975

Perspective ON AGING

A PUBLICATION OF
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON THE AGING

ED118872

CE006418

The stars are in your favor.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

MARY YOURY

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

In This Issue: Myths and Realities of Life for Older Americans

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

2

THE IMAGE OF AGING

Aside from the economic and social conditions of the older American, the public view of the elderly as human beings and contributing members of society was surveyed. As before, the public expectation of old age differed from the view of older people themselves.

When judged on a list of attributes associated with productive, active and effective individuals, "most people over 65" received positive ratings on only two counts: Substantial majorities of the public 18-64 consider them "very warm and friendly" (82%) and "very wise from experience" (68%).

But most people over 65 are not viewed as very active, efficient or alert: Less than half (41%) consider them "very physically active" and lesser percentages as "very good at getting things done (35%); "very bright and alert" (29%); "very open-minded and adaptable" (21%), though larger percentages on all counts conceded they were "somewhat" all these things.

In one area, being "very warm and friendly," the 65-plus (25%) were far more critical than the younger group of their peers; they were only slightly more generous in other aspects. They have apparently also bought the stereotypes of older people as being unalert, close-minded, nonproductive members of society, though older people tend to see themselves as more adaptable and open-minded than they're given credit for being.

Self-image High

While the public at large, young and old, may question the efficiency, mental alertness and flexibility of the older population, the 65 and over do not question their own attributes as individuals:

- Very bright and alert (58%/29%);
- Very open-minded and adaptable (63%/21%);
- Very good at getting things done (55%/35%).

The image that the public holds of most people over 65 varies only slightly from one demographic group to the next, with age appearing to be the most significant determinant of attitude; the youngest group of adult Americans seems to harbor the most negative attitudes toward the oldest and the more affluent somewhat more positive attitudes.

13

ACTIVITIES OF OLDER PEOPLE

The public at large thought the older group spends more time at passive, sedentary activities than the older group says it actually does.

- The public judged television to be the number one pastime of the older group; it actually was reported fourth by the older group.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON THE AGING, INC.

1828 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

OFFICERS

PRESIDENT:
*THE HON. ALBERT J. ABRAMS
Albany, New York, Secretary of the Senate, State of New York

VICE PRESIDENTS:
*MOTHER M. BERNADETTE DE LOURDES, O. Carm.
Trumbull, Connecticut, Administrator, St. Joseph's Manor

VICE PRESIDENTS:
*HOBART C. JACKSON
Philadelphic, Pennsylvania, Executive Director, Stephen Smith Geriatric Center
*JOHN W. MOORE, JR.
Waterbury, Connecticut, Vice President, Employee Relations, Scovill Manufacturing Company
*SIDNEY SPECTOR
Beechwood, Ohio, President, Social Development Corporation

SECRETARY:
*HUGH W. GASTON, A.I.A.
Albany, Georgia

TREASURER:
*JAMES R. GUNNING
New York, New York, Senior Vice President, Martin E. Segal Company

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
JACK OSSOFSKY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ROBERT AHRENS, *Chicago, Illinois*
Executive Director, Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens

MARGHERITTA ALLARDICE, *Detroit, Michigan*
Director, Senior Center Inc.

THE RT. REV. MSGR. JOSEPH T. ALVES, *Boston, Mass.*
Director, Family Counseling and Guidance Center

* WALTER M. BEATTIE, JR., *Syracuse, New York*
Director, All-University Gerontology Center, Syracuse University

HON. ROBERT D. BLUE, *Eagle Grove, Iowa*

ANDREW W. L. BROWN, *Detroit, Michigan*
Director, Community Services, UAW

ROBERT N. BUTLER, M.D., *Washington, D.C.*

FATHER LUCIUS F. CERVANTES, S.J., Ph.D., *St. Louis, Missouri*, St. Louis Commissioner of Aging

MARIA DEL PILAR CHRISTIAN, *Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico*
Associate Professor, Occupational Therapy, University of Puerto Rico

RHEA M. ECKEL CLARK, *Albany, New York*
Director, New York State Office for the Aging

IRENE CUCH, *Fort Duchesne, Utah*
Member, Tribal Business Committee, Ute Indian Tribe

MICHAEL DACSO, M.D., *New York, New York*
Medical Director, Daughters of Jacob Geriatric Center

ALVIN M. DAVID, *Ellicott City, Md.*

THE REV. DR. LOWELL R. DITZEN, *Washington, D.C.*

HUGH DOWNS, *Carefree, Arizona*
Author, Lecturer, TV Commentator

KATHERINE DUNHAM, *East St. Louis, Illinois*
Professor and Director, Performing Arts Training Center, Southern Illinois University

GILBERT EDWARDS, *Ft. Lauderdale, Florida*
President, Human Resources Foundation

EVELYN H. FORMAN, *New Rochelle, New York*

GUY FRAZIER, *Beaverton, Oregon*
Director of Personnel, Tektronix, Inc.

F. D. GASSAWAY, M.D., *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*
Medical Director, Gulf Oil Corporation

IRA L. GIBBONS, D.S.W., *Washington, D.C.*

HAROLD M. GOWING, *Portland, Oregon*

COL. ROBERT W. GUNTHER, USAF (Ret.), *Millbrook, New York*

PAUL HABER, M.D., *Washington, D.C.*
Deputy Assistant Chief Medical Director for Professional Services, Veterans Administration

RAYMOND HARRIS, M.D., *Albany, New York*
Chief, Cardiovascular Medicine, St. Peter's Hospital

ROBERT J. HAVIGHURST, Ph.D., *Chicago, Illinois*
Professor of Education and Human Development The University of Chicago

EDMUND P. HENNELLY, *New York, New York*
Manager, Government Relations, Mobil Oil Corporation

G. WARFIELD HOBBS, III, *Stonington, Connecticut*
President Emeritus, National Council on the Aging

* LOWELL IBERG, *New York, New York*
Deputy Director, State Communities Aid Association

MAURICE JACKSON, Ph.D., *Riverside, California*
Associate Professor, Dept. of Sociology, University of California, Riverside

GUY JUSTIS, *Chicago, Illinois*

JUANITA M. KREPS, Ph.D., *Durham, North Carolina*
Dean, Women's College, Duke University

KARL R. KUNZE, *Oxnard, California*
Kunze Associates

GERALD D. LaVECK, M.D., *Seattle, Washington*
Professor, Dept. of Epidemiology and International Health, School of Public Health, Seattle

INABEL B. LINDSAY, D.S.W., *Washington, D.C.*

GENERAL JOHN F. McMAHON, *New York, New York*
Commander-in-Chief, National Society of the Volunteers of America

PETER MEEK, *Ridgewood, New Jersey*

* GARSON MEYER, *Rochester, New York*
President Emeritus, National Council on the Aging

ALEXANDER MONRO, *Indianapolis, Indiana*
Assistant Director for Planning, Training and Evaluation, Central Indiana Council on Aging

JAMES C. O'BRIEN, *Washington, D.C.*

LEO PERLIS, *Washington, D.C.*
Director, Department of Community Services, AFL-CIO

* WILLIAM R. POTHIER, *San Francisco, California*
Executive Director, San Francisco Senior Center

* OLLIE A. RANDALL, *New York, New York*

ROBERT B. ROBINSON, *Denver, Colorado*
Director, Division of Services for the Aging, Colorado Commission on Aging

DAVID G. SALTEN, Ph.D., *New York, New York*
Vice President and Provost, New York Institute of Technology

THE REV. RUDY SANCHEZ, *Dallas, Texas*
First Mexican Baptist Church

ROGER SANDOVAL, *Fort Defiance, Arizona*
Director, Tribal Community Development Program, Navajo Tribe

HARRIS T. SCHRANK, *New York, New York*
Director, Office of Social Research, The Equitable Assurance Society of the United States

HON. MARGARET C. SCHWEINHAUT, *Kensington, Maryland*
Chairperson, Maryland Commission on the Aging

HON. MILTON J. SHAPP, *Harrisburg, Pennsylvania*
Governor, The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

EDWIN F. SHELLEY, *New York, New York*
Chairman, E. F. Shelley & Co., Inc.

HAROLD L. SHEPPARD, Ph.D., *Washington, D.C.*
Staff Social Scientist, W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research

MARGARET TISHMAN, *New York, New York*
Vice President, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies

PETE VILLA, *Phoenix, Arizona*

CLIFFORD WHITING, *Albuquerque, New Mexico*
Chairperson, New Mexico Commission on Aging

TAFFY WILBER, *St. Louis, Missouri*
President, Taffy Wilber and Associates, Inc.

HERBERT WILTSEE, *Atlanta, Georgia*
Director, Southern Office Council of State Governments

ELLEN WINSTON, Ph.D., *Raleigh, North Carolina*
President, National Council of Homemaker-Home Health Aide Services, Inc.

* Executive Committee Members

Vol. IV, No. 2 • March/April 1975

Perspective ON AGING

Published by The National Council on the Aging,
1828 L Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20036.

NCOA's Annual Parley Announced

**The 1975 Annual Conference
Of The National Council on the Aging
marking NCOA's 25th year of service
will be held from
September 28-October 2 at the
Sheraton-Park Hotel
in Washington, D.C.**

On our cover:

Harriet Sappington of New York City is here portrayed as a gypsy, only one of many roles she can assume if a modeling job calls for it. Turn to page 21 to read about her second career that began a mere six years ago.

Artwork by permission of the New York State Lottery and its advertising agency, Wells, Rich, Greene, Inc.

Contents

What is it Really like to be Old?
Editorial 2

Louis Harris Survey for NCOA 3

Old Age and Public Attitudes 4

Preparation for Old Age 7

Survey Advisory Committee 8

The Experience of Being Old 9

Community Involvement 12

The Image of Aging 13

The Politics of Old Age 16

The Media's Portrayal 18

Still a Lot to Give 19

**Bright, Quick, Feisty:
'Pzazz' at 78** 21

Public Policy Report 23

Consultation and design by Maurer, Fleisher, Zon & Anderson, Inc., production and layout by C. E. Behrens.

What Is It Really Like To Be Old?

The Louis Harris & Associates study, "The Myth and Reality of Aging in America," is by far the most extensive ever conducted to determine the public attitudes and perceptions of what it's like to be old in this country—and to document older Americans' views and attitudes about themselves and the personal experience of old age.

The National Council on the Aging commissioned the study to provide definitive data to practitioners, researchers, writers, students, legislators and the general public. For far too long, the people of this country have accepted without question all of the stereotypes and cliches about growing old. We hope the material, briefly excerpted in this issue of PERSPECTIVE, will separate the myth from the reality.

The study will also provide base data about the attitudes and perceptions of age for NCOA's newest program, the National Media Resource Center on the Aging. It will be used with other data to evaluate the results of future programs. Much more data will become available in a variety of forms, including views of leading specialists in the field of aging.

Several points should be emphasized about the conclusions and interpretation of the Harris data:

■ One finding in the area of public policy is extremely significant at this time: An overwhelming **97 percent of Americans** believe that Social Security payments should automatically increase with rises in the cost of living. The 1972 enactment of a cost-of-living provision providing for just that was a heartening step forward in the struggle to provide an adequate income for older people; *yet even before the beneficiaries receive their very first benefit increase* under the "inflation-proof" provision, the President wants to cut it back to a five percent increase in June 1975—though the cost of living in 1974 **alone** rose 12 percent.

The impact of the proposed reduction on the elderly poor when food and fuel costs are escalated even more is not hard to imagine. Far from hoarding the increases, the elderly would instead use the additional money and help to stimulate the lagging economy. If Congress needs a mandate to reject the Presidential attempt for a cutback, it's there in the Harris report.

■ Also, the conclusion is obvious that most of the U.S. older population has both the desire and the potential to be productive, contributing members of our society. They do not want to be "put on the shelf," excluded from social and economic activities or the society of those other than their peer groups.

■ Clearly, too, most older people feel that their condition in life is better, economically and socially, than the general public believes it to be: But "most" can be a deceptive term; it is vitally important to remember that many millions of older people are living at, or below, the poverty line. Thus, when 15 percent of people over 65 say that "not having enough money to live on" is a serious personal problem for them, that percentage translates to some three million needy persons, and the same is true of many other categories.

The National Council on the Aging is proud to make this study available in 1975, the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding.

We see the Harris survey as a fitting milestone for our organization, so long in the vanguard of innovation and change.

Louis Harris Survey for NCOA Assesses Myths and Realities Of Life for Older Americans

To understand the image which both younger and older Americans have of the elderly and to assess the reality of old age in our society, The National Council on the Aging, Inc. (NCOA), commissioned Louis Harris & Associates, Inc., to conduct a major, in-depth survey. The survey, conducted during the late spring and early summer months of 1974, was funded by a substantial grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, with additional funding from the Florence V. Burden Foundation.

As an important part of NCOA's program aimed at improving the public understanding of what roles of 65-plus Americans are and can be, the survey had a twofold purpose:

1) To examine the public's attitudes toward older Americans and their perceptions of what it is like to be old in this country today.
2) To document older Americans' views and attitudes about themselves and their personal experiences of old age.

For the study, trained Harris interviewers conducted a total of 4,254 in-person household interviews, including a representative cross-section of the American public 18 years of age and over. Interviewees were selected by random probability techniques, so that every household in the continental United States was guaranteed an equal chance of being drawn into the survey.

Scientific survey techniques, to provide adequate numbers of older people, both black and white, were used for detailed analysis of the group's conditions and attitudes. An additional cross-section of people 55 to 64 years of age was drawn into the sample, allowing an in-depth analysis of the group approaching retirement age. Where groups were sampled beyond their proportions in the U.S. population, they were weighted so that their natural proportions were represented.

The public 65 and over comprise 15% of the total adult population in this country, or approximately 21 million people. Compared to the 18-64 population, the older group has a higher proportion of women; considerably lower household incomes (a median of $4,800 compared to $12,400); numbers fewer blacks proportionately, and is far less well-educated (63% never graduated from high school compared to 26%). The Harris study showed like proportions of both groups in major metropolitan areas but a higher concentration of the 65-plus in rural areas. □

A moment of levity is shared by principals at the April press conference held in Washington, D.C. to announce results of the Louis Harris survey. Flanking Harris (center) are NCOA Executive Director Jack Ossofsky (at left) and NCOA President Albert J. Abrams.

OLD AGE AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES

THE BEST YEARS OF A PERSON'S LIFE

Few in the general public single out the later years as the most desirable period of life. Instead, substantial numbers (69%) chose the teens, twenties or thirties. Very few feel that way about the sixties (2%) and less than one percent about the seventies. A higher percentage of those who have reached the later years themselves see the sixties and seventies as an optimal period, though still not many; overall, only one in 50 consider the later years as the prime of life.

Each period in life is valued for its own reasons: The teens for limited responsibility, a time to enjoy life and have fun; the twenties for these reasons as well as a time to develop ambitions and set goals; the thirties as a time of greater wisdom and maturity, to enjoy family life and settle down; the forties and fifties as a time to enjoy the family, of stability and financial security, to enjoy the wisdom and experience of maturity.

Those who singled out the sixties as "best" cited retirement, relieving pressures of productive roles, and fewer family responsibilities allowing for more individual freedom.

Leisure, Independence among 'Best'

Though few single out the later years as the best time of a person's life, the vast majority (all but 16%) could volunteer some positive aspects of growing old. According to both old and young nationwide, having more leisure is foremost, i.e., more free time to enjoy life, "do the things you've always wanted to do," travel, enjoy your spouse, family and friends. Independence and freedom from responsibilities are next, followed by retirement.

The 18-64 group mentions leisure and retirement significantly more often than the older group experiencing it, and responses varied dramatically by income, education and race.

THE WORST YEARS OF A PERSON'S LIFE

Though most of those surveyed did not identify the sixties and seventies as the worst years, about a third of both the younger (33%) and older (35%) named these as the least desirable periods. Second only to the seventies (21%), the 18-64 group saw the teens (20%) as the most difficult period.

Just as certain decades were valued, those who singled out the teens through fifties as the worst

periods had their reasons: The teens as unsettled and tending to overestimate your own wisdom; the twenties as also unsettled, of financial problems, difficulties in adjusting to married life and raising children. The thirties' drawbacks were seen as the responsibility of raising children and financial problems; however, the precursors of aging, such as bad health and feeling older, were seen as the worst aspects of the forties and fifties.

Have Common Drawbacks

Those in the younger group choosing the sixties and seventies as bleak periods associated those years with common drawbacks of "bad health, illness," financial problems and "not being able to get around, do much or be involved." Particular problems were given for each decade: For the sixties, bad health (40%), retirement and difficulty in finding jobs (31%) and financial problems (20%); for the seventies, bad health (41%), loneliness (20%) and being dependent, a burden.

Those over 60 who designated the sixties and seventies as the worst periods cited such things as "not much to look forward to with the kids gone," "not enough money to get what you need, not to mention what you want," "too feeble to go out and have any fun" and the death of loved ones.

Bad Health, Loneliness among 'Worst'

While only one in three singled out the sixties and seventies as the worst years of life, the public as a whole (excepting 6%) could describe what

they consider the "worst things about being over 65."

For those under 65, such feelings were expressed as "perhaps loneliness, facing the fact of the inevitable," "boredom and limited income," "no longer feeling productive," "your health starts to get bad," "you don't have as many friends as when you were younger," to be "left alone and have to be sent to a rest home."

From personal experience, among the worst things about being over 65 are:

"At 65, I could do as much work as I could at 35 but no one wanted me."
"I wanted to work but my heart gave out."
"The younger generation just doesn't care about the older generation."
"Not having a husband to take you around."
"Financial problems are the worst."

When the responses were coded and tabulated, poor health came out far ahead of other responses as the major drawback of old age, followed by loneliness, financial problems, lack of independence, being neglected or rejected by the young and boredom. Yet, with the exception of poor health and forced retirement, those under 65, compared to those 65 and over, overstated every problem, indicating that young people's negative perceptions of old age are perhaps worse than the actual experience.

Women mentioned loneliness far more than men, not surprising since most outlive their husbands (53% to 15% of widowed men). Better educated (and therefore perhaps younger) people were more concerned with loneliness, financial problems, boredom and being neglected in old age than the less well-educated.

WHEN DOES OLD AGE OCCUR?

Is there some arbitrary cut-off point at which a person stops being middle-aged and becomes old? About half of those interviewed thought so, but nearly as many used functional criteria related to health, employment status, etc.

Notions of the average age at which a man or woman becomes old do not vary substantially by the age of the public. While those under 65 are slightly more likely to feel that 65 is the turning point than those 18-64, differences between the two age groups' responses were minimal (29% to 21%).

Staying active and involved may not keep a person young, as the old saying goes, but it can safely be said that it keeps a person's *image* young. Those who expressed the feeling that most people over 65 are useful in their communities were less likely to expect a person to become old before 65 than those who felt people over 65 were useless in the community.

Those who gave a fixed base for aging also attributed other conditions apart from chronology, primarily the visible signs of aging, such as getting sick, slowing down, wearing out, gray hairs and wrinkles (70% for men, 77% for women). Other reasons given were state of mind (feeling old), retirement, reaching a turning point, family and social changes. The latter were considered more responsible for old age among women, and retirement was felt to age men more often than women.

Very Serious Problems Seen

Poor health. Fear of crime. Loneliness. Not enough money to live on. Feeling neglected, dependent or burdensome. Boredom. Lack of adequate medical care. Too little education. Not enough to do to keep busy. Too few friends. Poor housing. Not enough job opportunities. Lack of transportation. Inadequate clothing.

That these problems, and a host of others, do indeed exist for many older Americans was substantiated by the survey of people 65 and over. However, in addition to measuring the experience of old age in America, a major purpose of the survey was to measure the expectations; that is, what

the public, young and old, think life is like for "most people over 65."

Show Wide Discrepancies

When the problems attributed to the 65-plus were compared to what older people themselves identify as very serious problems, there were in most cases enormous discrepancies in degree:

Fear of crime (23% to 50% of public)
Poor health (21% to 51%)
Not enough money to live on (15% to 62%)
Loneliness (12% to 60%)
Not enough medical care (10% to 44%)
Not enough education (8% to 20%)
Not feeling needed (7% to 54%)
Not enough to do to keep busy (6% to 37%)

Older people may have been reluctant to identify their problems as "very serious." Yet, when the analysis went a step further and included definitions of "somewhat serious" in personal experience, there still remained, in most cases, considerable differences between the actual experience and the severity of problems expected by the public at large.

Lack of Mobility Sore Point

In another area, that of mobility, substantial minorities of the 65-plus complained of limitations imposed by danger of being robbed or attacked on the street (24% to 46% of public expectations); difficulty of walking and climbing stairs (22% to 44%); general health (20% to 41%); no buses or subways available (15% to 39%); not having a car or being able to drive (14% to 38%); cost of buses and subways (9% to 33%).

Most striking of the findings is that, while the public 18-64 and the public 65 and over do not disagree substantially in their evaluations of the problems of "most people over 65," many of the 65-plus group do not consider these problems as very serious for themselves personally but for others of their peer group.

When the 18-64 group was asked to rate the same questions personally as very serious, somewhat serious or hardly at all a problem, with only a few exceptions the responses were nearly identical to the older public. Putting myths aside, the personal testimony shows that the problems for older people, except for health and fear of crime, are comparable to those of younger people.

The message emerges here that the older public, like the young, has bought the negative images of old age, apparently assuming that life is really tough for most people over 65 and that they are really exceptions to the rule.

The conclusions: Problems do exist for older people. But the same problems do not exist for all older persons, substantiating the fact that the aged are a mixed group. Nor should having a problem be confused with *being* a problem.

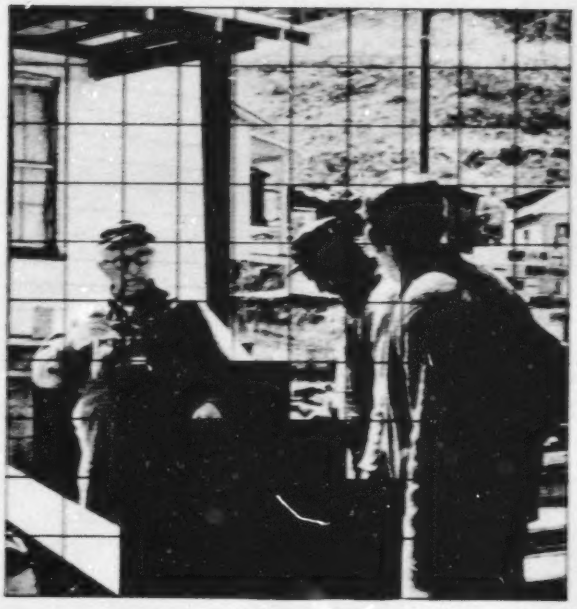
Generalizations about the elderly as an economically and socially deprived group can do the old a disservice, presenting them merely as a problem and not as part of the solution of society's problems. As a group for whom there is little social and economic demand, the older population also may lose self-esteem, with deleterious effects to society.

An exclusive emphasis on problems of old age can do the young a disservice, as well, turning them away from an appreciation of the talents and energies that older people can still contribute and, perhaps, giving a false image of what life will be like for them in the future. □

In conversation at the press conference are Robert M. Long, NCOA director of development (left), and Merrell M. Clark, vice president, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. The Harris survey was funded by a substantial grant from the Clark Foundation.

Ollie A. Randall, described as the "grande dame" of NCOA by President Albert J. Abrams, responds to a reporter's question at the press conference held to announce results of the Louis Harris survey.

86% of the American Public Agree: Workers Should Not be Forced to Retire Because of Age



Not only is there overwhelming opposition by the public at large (81 to 12 percent against with 2 percent not sure) to mandatory retirement at a fixed age, but also 79 percent of those responsible for hiring and firing share this opinion.

From the public opinion survey, "The Myth and Reality of Aging in America" conducted by Louis Harris and Associates for The National Council on the Aging, Inc.

PREPARATION FOR OLD AGE

As shown earlier, not only the young take a negative view of old age; the older public has also bought the myths. Yet older people, who see old age as related to having problems, consider themselves as individual exceptions to the rule, since life is not so bad for them.

A third of persons 65 and over in the survey said that their life now was better than they had expected it to be when younger; almost half said it was about the way they expected, and only 11% reported it worse than expected.

However, income and race more than age affect the tendency to feel that life hasn't measured up to expectations. Twice as many people with incomes $7,000 and below as those with incomes $15,000 and over feel life is worse than expected. Among the black elderly, only 22% felt life was better than expectations as opposed to 37% of the whites.

Reasons for believing that life is better than expected included financial security, good family and/or marriage, generally a good life with few problems and health good or better than expected.

For those who felt that life had turned out worse than expected, reasons are primarily separation from family and spouse or poor health; only a small percentage cite financial problems. Of the wide variety of other reasons given, total percentages were minute.

STEPS TO PREPARE FOR LATER YEARS

Majorities of the total public, young and old, agree on seven "very important steps people should take" in preparing for their later years:

- Ensure medical care is available (86%)
- Prepare a will (81%)
- Build up savings (80%)
- Learn about pensions and Social Security benefits (80%)
- Buy your own home (70%)
- Develop hobbies, leisure-time activities (64%)
- Decide whether you want to move or stay where you are (50%)

In addition, three in 10 (31%) feel it is very important to "plan new part-time or full-time jobs."

By and large, the older public has taken the steps they consider are very important to prepare for later years. In four areas, however, the older public seems less prepared than it would like to be.

Regret Lack of Savings

More people said they felt it was important to build up savings than had been able to do so (85% to 73%). The same was true of preparing a will (79% to 65%), planning new part-time or full-time jobs (26% to 16%) and enrolling in retirement preparation or counseling programs (19% to 8%).

Only half considered deciding whether you want to move or continue to live where you are as a very important step, yet many (72%) report already having taken that step, a response showing the greatest net difference. Perhaps having already done so, the step becomes less important in contrast to other steps and decisions still to be made.

The lower the income, the less prepared an older person appears to be for later years. Leisure-time activities have not been developed throughout life, savings have not been built up. A fairly substantial percentage of elderly with incomes of

$3,000 and under (79%) feel sure of having medical aid available, though fewer than in the higher income bracket immediately above, $3,000 to $6,999 (90%).

Blacks in general are less well-prepared for old age than older whites: less than half as many blacks as whites have built up savings, 25 percent more older whites than blacks own their own homes. Two areas where the black elderly appear better prepared for their later years than older whites: Higher number of blacks than whites have talked to older people about what it's like to grow old and have moved in with their children or other relatives.

Recognizably, a number of variables are related to being comfortable and secure in later life: Income alone is not a sufficient indicator; total assets and measures taken in preparation for later years are equally important. Many of the steps relating to preparation for making old age better are part of younger life as well. But being well-off in younger life does not insure being well-off in later life.

Would Have Done Differently

While substantial numbers of those 65 and over surveyed did take important steps to prepare for their later years and many (43%) doubted they could have done more, more have regrets that they couldn't foresee well enough what it would be like today to prepare differently.

They would have tried to save more, held on to medical insurance, made investments or bought property, tried to get more education or a different or better job for higher pay, better pension and Social Security benefits. Some regret retiring too early.

Of those who feel they could have done nothing differently in preparing for old age, it was frequently because family responsibilities precluded getting a better education or training that would have turned the courses of their lives.

Yet, as previously mentioned, only one in 10 think old age has turned out worse than they expected, and three times that many that it turned out better. □

ADVISORY COMMITTEE, NATIONAL ATTITUDE POLL ON AGING

***Dr. Robert Havighurst, Chairman**
Professor, Education and Human Development
University of Illinois, Chicago

Orville Brim
President, Foundation for
Child Development
New York, New York

***Alvin David**
Ellicott City, Maryland
(former Assistant Commissioner for
Program Planning and Evaluation, SSA)

Earle Gerson
Chief, Demographic Survey
Bureau of the Census
Washington, D.C.

Dr. Robert Hill
Director of Research
National Urban League
Washington, D.C.

***Dr. Maurice Jackson**
Associate Professor of Sociology
University of California, Riverside

*Member of NCOA Board of Directors

Dr. George Maddox
Director, Center for
the Study of Aging
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

Dr. Matilda Riley
Professor of Sociology
Bowdoin College
Brunswick, Maine

***Dr. Harris Schrank**
Director, Office of Social Research
The Equitable Life Assurance
Society of the United States
New York, New York

Dr. Ethel Shanas
Professor, Department of Sociology
University of Illinois, Chicago

***Dr. Harold Sheppard**
American Institutes for Research
Washington, D.C.

Dr. Gordon Streib
Professor, Department of Sociology
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING OLD

For comparative purposes, older people have been treated in this study as a homogeneous group with one factor in common: They all had passed their sixty-fifth birthday.

Yet, while society tends to view older people as a homogeneous entity, the findings of this study underscore not their homogeneity but rather their differences. While older people as a group may not suffer as seriously as the public thinks from a host of problems, both economic and psychological, certain subgroups of older people suffer far more seriously than others.

Similarly, while the 65 and over themselves have a far better self-image than the image attributed to them by the public at large, certain groups of older people have lower self-esteem than others. Measures of general life satisfaction among older people and overall psychological well-being differentiate older people rather than unite them, in the same way that these same measures point out the differences among various groups of young people.

In other words, there appears to be no such thing as the typical experience of old age, nor the typical older person. At no point in one's life does a person suddenly stop being himself and turn into an "old person," with all the myths and stereotypes that the term involves. Instead, the social, economic and psychological factors that affect individuals when they are young often stay with them throughout their lives. Older people share with each other their chronological age, but factors more powerful than age alone determine the conditions of their later years.

SERIOUSNESS OF PROBLEMS FOR 65-PLUS

Income plays a key role in determining the degree of security and comfort in which older people live. The elderly poor (the 23% with household incomes under $3,000) understandably have a far harder time coping with life than those with higher incomes. Not only do the older poor have more difficulty making ends meet financially or securing adequate medical care, housing and clothing, their low economic position also appears to increase dramatically their sense of loneliness and rejection by society.

Increased fear of crime, serious health problems, limited budgets, etc., also severely decrease the mobility of the older poor, heightening their feelings of isolation. For about one in three of the elderly poor, serious health problems, not enough money and fear of crime make life a difficult struggle indeed.

Share Many Problems

Further study shows that the elderly poor share with younger persons of their income group many identical problems, except for a poorer health level. The older group does not, however, report experiencing the impact of financial problems with the intensity the younger group does. Older people appear to be less dissatisfied, perhaps because their expectations are more modest.

In every problem area except one (not enough education), the elderly black feel far more burdened by very serious problems than do the elderly white. They report more fear of crime (twice as much as the white group); more poor health; more than three times as many say not having enough money to live on is a very serious problem. The same proportions are shown in respect to not having enough medical care when compared with the white group. Of the 65 and over blacks, 23% reports loneliness as a very serious problem, while only 11 percent of the whites in the same age group mentions this.

Though income difference may partially explain this, even when income is equal for black

and white groups the black group reports far more serious problems, twice as much in many cases and increasing with age. In three areas, problems stand out as more serious for the 80-plus group than for those in their sixties: Poor health, loneliness, not feeling needed.

Fear of Crime High

In only three areas does the over-65 group as a whole appear to suffer more serious problems than the young: Fear of crime, poor health and loneliness. Yet, even where results vary somewhat by age, they vary far more dramatically by income and race.

The older public has more problems in mobility than the young. Obstacles which keep the old from getting where they want to go include danger of being robbed or attacked on the street, difficulty in walking and climbing stairs and general health. The lack of public transportation and not having a car or being able to drive affect the older public substantially more than the younger group. Among the 84 and over group, mobility problems appear more serious than among those in their late sixties.

The conclusions: Poverty, not old age, creates more very serious problems in people's lives: the poor young suffer just as much as the poor old, if not more. In the same way, race appears to generate more very serious problems than does age. With the exception of poor health, afflicting older blacks more than younger blacks, 18-64 blacks are afflicted with the same problems as those 65 and over, sometimes more seriously. In every area, blacks of all ages suffer problems more severely than whites.

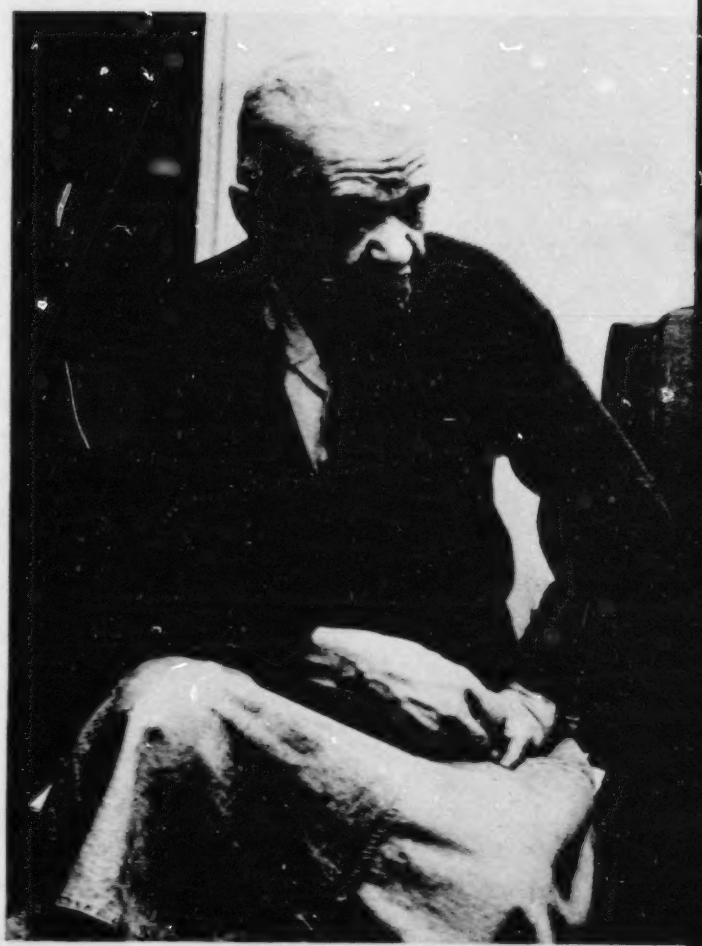
Just as low-income groups suffer more seriously from every problem than the more affluent do, so do the less well-educated suffer more on all counts than the college-educated. The college-educated in today's 65-plus population represents a small proportion (7%); however, they report experiencing very serious problems less than the high school/some college category.

Education Prime Factor

Consistently, there seems a correlation at all ages between the level of education and the severity of problems experienced, holding true into older ages with different emphases: Health, fear of crime and loneliness predominate, while in younger ages severe problems relate to money, housing and education.

In only a few areas does a sex differential appear to affect the degree to which older people suffer from various problems:

- Older women tend more than older men to report fear of crime as a very serious problem (also true of the younger group).



- Loneliness appears to afflict older women more than older men; however, more women than men over 65 are widowed.
- Older men complain slightly more than older women about lack of job opportunities, though differences at all ages are minimal.
- Poor housing seems to affect younger women more than younger men, though older men and women appear to suffer in comparable numbers.

Thus, on the whole, key demographics such as income, race, sex and education are more important indicators of serious problems than age, though for the 80 and over, three problems are more serious than for those in the late sixties: Poor health, loneliness and not feeling needed.

SELF-IMAGE OF THE 65 AND OVER

While the public 65 and over generally tends to see itself individually in a far more positive light

than the public at large, the self-esteem of older persons varies noticeably by key demographic variables.

In four of the seven image areas tested, income (and race) have very little effect on how older people view themselves; comparable numbers of the least affluent see themselves as very warm and friendly, very wise from experience, very bright and alert, very open-minded and adaptable. In determining their self-image about physical capabilities, income plays a more important role. The more affluent older people are more likely than the less affluent to see themselves as being very good at getting things done, very physically and sexually active, possibly showing a relation to good health as a functional result of better care concurrent with higher income.

The pattern holds in the younger group to a lesser extent: Those 18-54 with incomes under $7,000 view themselves as somewhat less physically active than those with incomes of $15,000 or more in the same age category (60% to 69%). Differences in physical activity between the less and the more affluent vary more dramatically in the 65 and over group.

Younger Blacks More Positive

Generally, older blacks tend to have a less positive self-image than older whites, coming closest in the image area perceptions of being very warm and friendly (69% to 73%), very wise from experience (63% to 70%) and very sexually active (11% to 10%). They rate themselves lower in being very bright and alert (54% to 69%), very open-minded and adaptable (51% to 64%), very good at getting things done (45% to 56%) and very physically active (31% to 50%).

Some of these same differences exist between younger blacks and whites, to a much lesser extent. In some areas, younger blacks match younger whites in self-esteem, suggesting that recent movements toward raising black consciousness have successfully helped the self-image of younger blacks.

Better educated older people appear to have more positive self-images, both in the areas of mental and physical activity, than do the less well-educated. A lower percentage of those whose education ended with some high school or less see themselves as very bright and alert or physically active. Retirement tends to wash out income differences, while differences in educational background remain. However, the key variable of education also operates in younger groups.

More Women Widowed

In only one area does sex differentiation appear to have an impact on older people's self-image, that of sexual activity. More of the 65-plus men report they are very sexually active than the women of the same age group, who are more likely to be unmarried or widowed.

With 11% of the group 65 and over calling themselves very sexually active and 28% somewhat sexually active (and another 15% not sure how to answer the question), the myth of older people losing interest in sex is dissipated.

Social and Family Involvement

For the Harris study, the degree of contact those 65 and older had with relatives or close friends was compared to that of younger persons. With a range of 0 to 30 points given for responses, interviewees were asked if they had family or close friends and when they had last seen them in a stipulated period. A third question asked if there was someone they felt close enough to talk to about things that really concerned them.

Length and quality of contact were not measured, nor numbers of individuals, and casual social contacts or those related to community or job setting were omitted. The median scores for the 18-64 group and the 65-plus group were all nearly the same, with indications that the elderly are not nearly so isolated as the myths portray them to be.

In the true loneliness gauge, the third question, only 8% of the older group and 5% of the younger said they had no one "close enough to talk to" about things of real concern, and many of these said it wasn't necessary.

The responses indicate that younger people turn to their spouses, while older people talk to their children about what really bothers them. □

11

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The public expected older people to spend far more time at sedentary, passive activities than older people say they do. Though older people from their responses are as equally involved as those under 65 in many activities, economic and physical limitations make the facilities providing leisure time or recreational activities out of reach for many of the 65-plus.

Far fewer older people report having a library convenient, for instance, than do young people. Public parks, movies, sport events, live concerts or theater and museums all were mentioned as convenient places to go by younger people in large percentages. There was a marked difference in the older age group seeing any of these as "convenient."

Both old and young agreed the home of a neighbor or relative, church or synagogue and places to shop were convenient. With a higher level of education, more places were seen as convenient; still for the younger group parks, movies, sports events and live performances are more convenient than for the old. Location is less of a factor in accessibility than economic mobility, physical mobility and education.

With the younger public having substantially higher incomes than those 65 and over, it would be easy to attribute the lower attendance rate to income factors. However, the young with the same income level as older people attend cultural or artistic events far more often than older people. This is particularly true of movies, where attendance was reported at half the rate for the old compared with the young. The older group's lower attendance apparently is because they view facilities as less convenient.

RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT OF 65-PLUS

When questioned about church or synagogue attendance in the last year, the percentage of responses for the 18-65 group and the 65-plus group were close. Attendance at a church or synagogue, however, is slightly higher among the older public than among those under 65. Attendance is lowest among the very young, peaks among those 55 to 79 and falls off somewhat at 80 and over.

Reponses of the older group surveyed indicated that while attendance at a house of worship does not increase steadily with age, the importance attached to religion in people's lives does. Seventy-one percent of the public 65 and over feels religion is very important in their own lives, compared with only 49% of those under 65. Fewer of the older group identify their religion as "none" than do the younger public.

INTEREST IN SENIOR CITIZEN CENTERS

For half of the public 55 and over, a senior citizen center or golden age club is convenient to attend. Senior citizen centers are apparently least accessible to blacks, to older people in the South and to people in rural areas.

There is a relationship between higher income and a senior citizen center or club being "convenient," matching findings about other facilities being more accessible to persons with higher income and less so for the lower income group. One-fifth of the public 65 and over and 13% of the 55 to 64 group say that they have attended a senior citizen center or golden age club in the past year or so. A 57% majority of the public 55 and over have not attended a senior citizen center or golden age club in the past year, saying they have no interest in attending or are too busy.

Poorer Attend More

While such centers were considerably less convenient to blacks, black attendance among those 55 and over is comparable to that of whites. The lowest income group (under $7,000) attended more frequently than the higher income groups. This is especially noteworthy in view of the fact that the lower income groups report that the centers or clubs are less convenient to them than do the upper income groups.

While 13% of the public 55 and over have been to a senior citizen center in the past year or so, 19% of the total public 55 and over said that they would like to attend. Interest is highest among blacks; an additional 39% of blacks said they would like to attend.

The 19% of people 55 and over who would like to attend but have not done so give the following reasons: No time, too busy (33%); no facilities here; don't know where there are any (21%); transportation problems (13%), and poor health (12%). The more affluent are apt to give "no time" as their reason, while the less affluent mention frequently that there are no facilities or transportation problems. □

• The public thought of sitting and thinking as the second most favorite pastime of older people; the 65-plus group reported it as their fifth most common activity.

Older persons seem to spend the same amount of time on most pastimes as those under 65. Except for more television watching in the older group and the younger group's spending more time on caring for family members, working and participating in sports, involvement in activities mentioned was nearly comparable.

Though the 65-plus group was far less likely than those 18-64 to exaggerate the amount of time most people over 65 spend sitting and thinking, sleeping or just doing nothing, older people are still more likely to attribute to their peers the sedentary pastimes in which they are themselves involved.

The 65-and-over population reported spending "a lot of time personally in socializing with friends" (47%); followed by raising plants or gardening (39%); reading (36%); watching television (36%); sitting and thinking (31%); caring for younger or older family members (27%); participating in hobbies and recreation (26%); going for walks (25%); participating in organizations or clubs (17%); sleeping (16%); just doing nothing (15%); working part-time or full-time (10%); doing volunteer work (8%); in political activities (6%); participating in sports (3%).

Not Absolute Measures

With time seen as a relative and subjective measure, what may be seen by one person as a "lot of time" may seem like "hardly any time at all" to another. Therefore, these results should not be interpreted as absolute measures; they are valuable as indications of the kinds of activities people see themselves involved in and the degree of involvement.

With the public at large seeing older people spending more time at sedentary activities, it is no wonder that it considered older people as "not having enough to do to keep busy," though those 65 and over deny that this is a serious problem.

USEFUL COMMUNITY MEMBERS

In the minds of the general public, being a useful member of one's community involves, primarily, taking part in community activities, organizations and politics and helping or serving others.

The 65-and-over group has a relatively high self-image of being useful members of the community, a more positive view than the 18-64 age group has of them. Also, many more of the older group (40%) thought of themselves as "very useful members of their community" compared to what the younger group (29%) felt about themselves. This shows the satisfaction and sense of usefulness which those 65 and over find in community involvement and the importance attached by older people to the role of helping others.

COMPARED TO 10/20 YEARS AGO

Most of the public agrees that today's older people are better educated and live longer than those of 10 and 20 years ago; more older people now live alone and are independent than before; older people are healthier now than they used to be. The public believes that older people in general are better off financially than one or two decades ago and recognizes that there are more of them now. Generally, the 18-64 group agrees with the 65-plus group, except that the latter sees itself

even more positively as better off financially than older people used to be.

It became apparent that an older person views the economic status of his peer group according to his own economic conditions. There was a relationship to income level and agreement within a group about economic conditions: The higher the economic level, the more people tended to agree with each other about conditions.

Under the $7,000 income level, the 18-64 age group largely agrees older people are worse off financially than they used to be; the 65-plus group of the same income level disagree. Thus, the view from "outside" seems very different from the view of the group experiencing the economic situation.

All in all, as a group, the 65-plus population sampled recognizes that the status and conditions of the older group have improved over the 10 or 20 years: That the elderly population is a growing one, healthier, more apt to live alone, better educated and in better financial shape than it used to be.

THE YOUNG'S RESPECT FOR PEOPLE OVER 65

The survey showed a substantial proportion of those 65 and over (45%) feel they get less respect from the young than they deserve, not surprising considering the variety of negative perceptions the young have about old people. Older blacks reported too little respect from the young in higher percentages than whites. However, the under-65 public seems more aware of the lack of respect than the older group, with a full 70 percent feeling that people 65 and over get too little respect from young people these days.

Respect is by no means a one-way street; just as the old expect respect from the young, so do the young expect it from the old. Forty-two percent of the 18-64 group felt they get just about the right amount of respect from people over 65. A third disagreed, believing young people in the 18-64 age group get too little respect from older people. There seems to be an increase with education in feeling that younger people do not get enough respect.

LIFE SATISFACTIONS

To compare the general life satisfactions of those 65 and over to those under 65, both groups were asked to agree or disagree with a series of 18 statements, *The Life Satisfaction Index Z*, developed by Dr. Robert Havighurst, professor of education and human development, University of Chicago, and NCOA board member.

Majorities of the older group responded similarly to the younger group on all but one of the positive statements, showing differences of at least 10 percentage points on only seven statements overall.

Older people, like younger, agree that they:

- Expect "some interesting and pleasant things to happen to me in the future." (57% to 86%)
- Feel "things I do now are as interesting as they ever were." (72% to 82%)
- Have "made plans for things I'll be doing a month or a year from now." (53% to 71%)
- Feel "just as happy now as when I was younger." (56% to 68%)

Less than a majority of the older group (32% to 56%) agree that "these are the best years of my life." Differences on two of the negative statements also emerged, with more of the older group members agreeing that they feel:

- "Old and somewhat tired." (46% to 21%)
- "This is the dreariest time of my life." (23% to 13%)

An index based on the 18 statements scored on a scale of 0-36 by the following procedure:

— two points for agreement with a positive statement or disagreement with a negative statement.

— one point for each "not sure" or "no" answer.

— 0 for each disagreement with a positive statement or agreement with a negative statement.

The median score for the public 18-64 was 28.3, only slightly higher than the mean 26.0 for the public 65 and over. However, median scores dropped by increasing age: 27.4 for those 65-69, 25.7 for those 70-79 and 23.8 for those 80 and over.

Equates Positive View

But other demographic factors appear to have a greater influence than age on life satisfactions, including income, level of education and racial differences. The portion of the public with the highest life satisfaction scores are also more positive in evaluating other people, especially so for the older group.

General life satisfaction is higher for those of all ages who are employed than those who are not, becoming most noticeable among the older group: A ful 72% of the 65 and over still employed expect " interesting and pleasant things to happen," compared to only 52% of the retired 65-plus.

Overall, the older public seems to be only slightly less satisfied with their lives—past, present and future—than are those under 65, though those 80 and over are somewhat less satisfied than those who recently turned 65. □

THE POLITICS OF OLD AGE

Thirty-six percent of this country's working people say their place of business has a pension or other employee benefit plan with a fixed retirement age. Thus, a third of all working people can expect to be told to retire from their jobs at a fixed age.

Apart from the required retirement age in many organizations, a variety of pressures are exerted on workers approaching the mid-sixties to move over and make room for the young. With increasing frequency, these pressures are beginning for many workers before 60. The elderly seem less aware of these policies than those involved in the hiring and firing.

Such policies can be interpreted as being discriminatory against older workers. With the pressures of inflation, such discrimination is likely to increase.

Oppose Mandatory Retirement

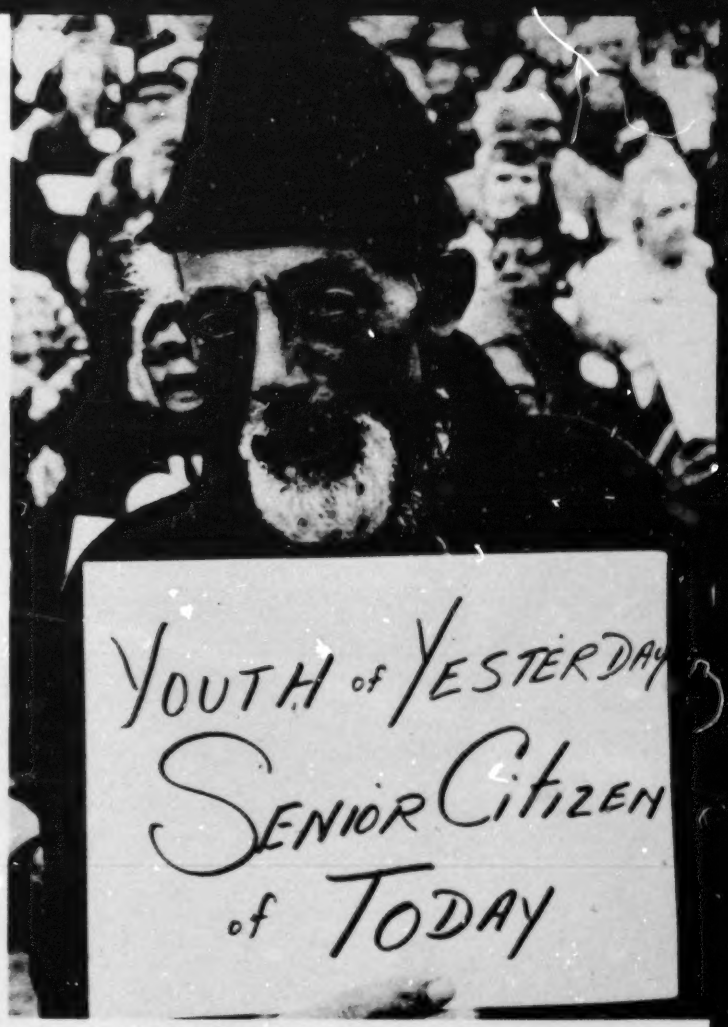
The public is largely opposed to putting people out to pasture at a fixed, inflexible age; a large majority (86% to 12%) agree that "nobody should be forced to retire because of age if he wants to continue working and is still able to do a good job." A majority also agreed (58% to 36%) that "most older people can continue to perform as well on the job as they did when they were younger." However, nearly half of the public (49% to 46%) recognize some advantages to fixed retirement policies, feeling that "older people should retire when they can, to give younger people more of a chance on the job."

Many are aware of the administrative difficulties involved in retirement decisions on an employee-by-employee basis: They agreed (49% to 43%) that "since many people are ready to retire at 65, and it's hard to make an exception for those who are not ready, it makes sense to have a fixed retirement age for everyone." However, the findings suggest that most hiring and firing decision-makers would not oppose some kind of individualized method for determining who should be forced to retire.

16

Many Shun Retirement

Another prevalent myth: That all workers are ready to retire at 65. While nearly half of retired or unemployed people 65 and over said they looked forward to stopping work, nearly as many said they did not (48% to 45%). A full 61% of those with incomes under $3,000 did not look forward to stopping work.



Retired and unemployed people 65 and over report missing the money work brought in; just as important as the income were the coworkers. Majorities of those retired or unemployed said they missed the work itself, the feeling of being useful and things happening around them.

With the country moving toward even younger retirement ages, the public is divided on whether or not this is a positive trend. The 18-64 age group agreed by a plurality (47% to 39%) that younger retirement is a good thing; those 65 and over disagreed (47% to 33%), and 20 percent were not sure.

Those who opted for earlier retirement reasoned: It gives people a chance to enjoy life and do things before they get too sick or too old; it also makes more jobs for younger people.

Those under 65 are much more likely than those 65 and over to feel that earlier retirement gives people a chance to enjoy life. Those opposed to earlier required retirement felt that work makes people feel useful and needed, that retirement precipitates illness and old age; that people should be able to work as long as they want to. The 85-plus group felt more strongly than the young that retirement ages people.

The results of the survey represent a strong public mandate for the roll-back of mandatory re-

tirement guidelines and practices to make fuller use of the resources older workers represent in our society.

Government Support of Retired People

Those who choose to retire or who are no longer able to continue their work should have the right to retire, the public feels, and to turn to the government for financial support.

Asked, "Who should provide income for older people when they are no longer working?" 68% of the total public responded that the Federal Government should, through Social Security. Further findings underscore the idea that the government, with its powers of taxation, has the responsibility and means to support older people (81% to 14%). The under-65 agree even more strongly than the retired themselves.

The total public (76% to 19%) also feels that "no matter how much a person earned during his working years, he should be able to have enough money to live on comfortably when he's older and retired."

Agreeing almost unanimously that older people have the right to live comfortably, the public also endorsed support of older people in line with rising prices, recognizing that persons on fixed income may be victimized by inflation. By an overwhelming majority (97%), the public, both old and young, supported cost-of-living escalators in Social Security payments.

SUPPORT FOR OLDER PEOPLE: A POLITICAL FORCE

From the young and the old, the survey disclosed potential support for a movement to improve the conditions and social status of those over 65. The under-65 are most conscious of the need for such a movement; 81% of this group feel people need to join together to work toward improving conditions for people 65 and over, and 70% of the older group shared this feeling.

Substantial numbers would be interested in joining a group with these goals: The percentages from the survey who said they would "certainly" or "probably" join and take part represent 44.5 million of the 18-64 group and 6.7 million of the 65-plus potential for such an organization.

Thus, both young and old can identify with other older Americans as people sharing the same needs and problems of all humans.

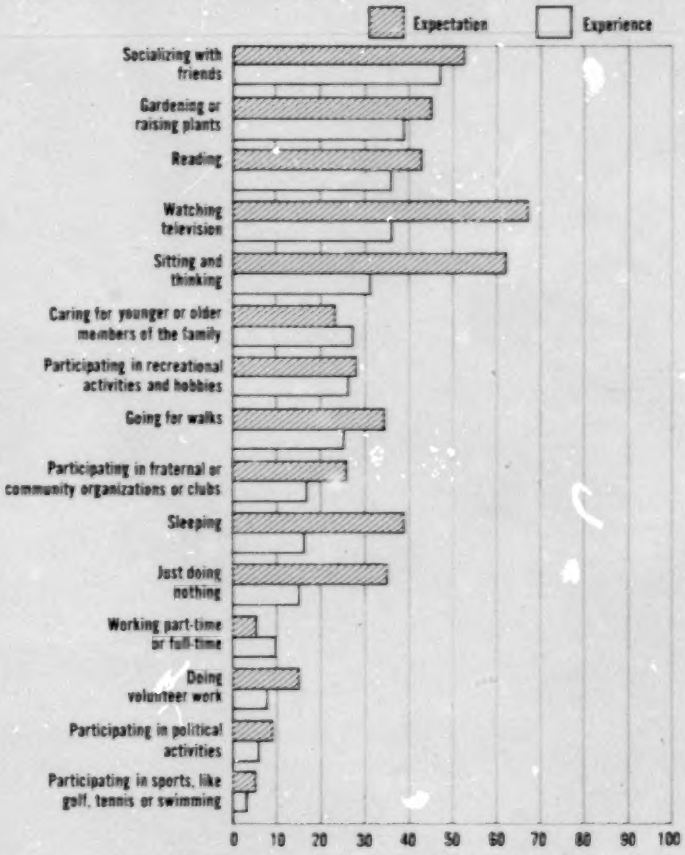
What Should Older Americans Be Called?

What's in a name? The 65 and over Americans in the survey sampling generally expressed strong likes and dislikes, indicating that, for most, they had rather it not be "old man" or "old woman" (67%); "aged person" (50%); "old timer" (45%) or "golden ager" (36%). Majorities preferred, instead, to be called either a "mature American" (55%); "senior citizen" (50%), or "elderly person" (38%). However, 38% didn't like the appellation "elderly," either.

Asked to choose one name by which they preferred to be called, "senior citizen" topped the list of responses, followed by "mature American" and "retired person." About one in three, especially in the poor groups, volunteered that "it doesn't matter," and minute percentages weren't sure. □

17

"A Lot of Time" Spent by Older People in Various Activities—
Public Expectation VS. Personal Experience



A comparison between the activities the public thinks people over 65 spent "a lot of time" doing and the activities in which older people actually say they engage shows the perception is quite different from the reality . . . that the older public is far more active than imagined.

From the public opinion survey, "The Myth and Reality of Aging in America" conducted by Louis Harris and Associates for The National Council on the Aging, Inc.

THE MEDIA'S PORTRAYAL

Information in the survey seems to indicate that the media's coverage of the elderly—the poor, the sick, the institutionalized and the unemployed or retired—may protect and reinforce the distorted stereotypes of old age. By playing up what exists for only a small segment of the old, the media may be perpetuating the myths of old age.

On the whole, the public is uncritical of the media for the way it projects old people. Majorities of readers, watchers and listeners feel that newspapers, magazines, books, television and radio usually "give a fair picture of what older people are like," or even "make older people look better than they really are." Only one in five recognizes that television programs may be "making older people look worse than they really are."

Younger More Critical of Media

The younger public is somewhat more critical of the media portrayal than the older group; heavy watchers tend to be less critical than light watchers. Most agree, however, that television shows young people, not old.

The total public looked up to or admired the following older people in television programs or commercials: The Waltons (21%); Bob Hope(9%); Jack Benny (8%); Robert Young (8%); Buddy Ebsen/Barnaby Jones (6%), and Redd Foxx (6%).

Those under 65 are most apt to admire the Waltons and Robert Young than those 65 and over, who are more likely to admire Lawrence Welk.

Blacks were less likely to find television personalities to look up to, and when they did, it was other exponents than the whites admired. Highest on the blacks' list were Redd Foxx (20%), followed by the Waltons (11%), and Bea Arthur as Maude (6%).

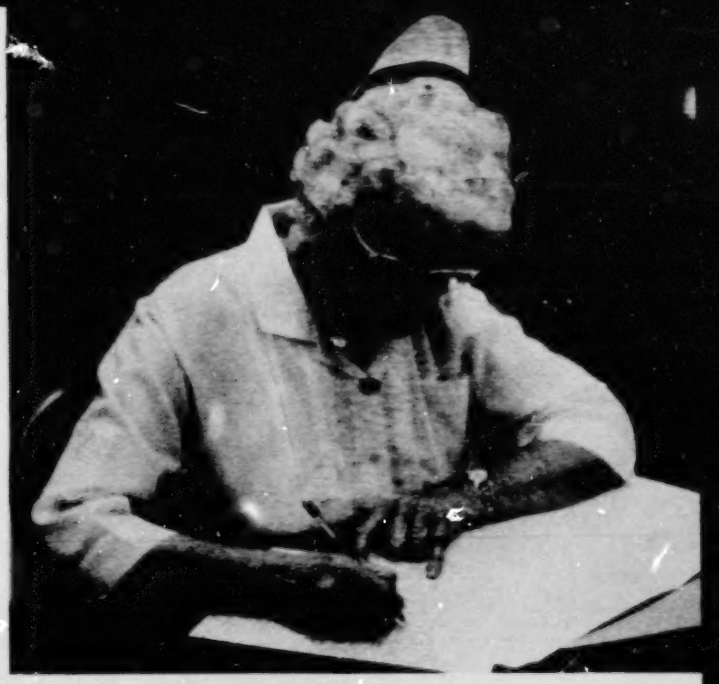
PRESENT AND POTENTIAL ROLE OF THE MEDIA

There are no indications that television, the medium which reaches the broadest audience, has had either a negative or positive effect on the way the public views older people. It may be that television reflects societal attitudes toward old age, reinforcing the myths.

If the overall image of older people is to be changed, it could be done perhaps most effectively through the use of television. Groups in every income and educational level, black and white, spend more time watching television than reading books, newspapers, magazines or listening to radio.

The youngest adults (18-24), revealing the least positive attitudes toward older people, unlike other age groups, reported spending as much time listening to the radio during the previous day as they did watching television. Thus, the use of radio as a medium in addition to television could be an effective tool to bring about changes in the younger population's attitudes in respect to the elderly. □

STILL A LOT TO GIVE



Few of the 65-plus appear to be willing to be relegated to the sidelines of society; three of four in the survey prefer to spend most of their time with other people of all ages, not just their own, and the 18-64 group expected this to be true.

And the older generation is by no means as isolated from the young as myth would have it; a substantial majority have living children (81%) and grandchildren (75%), and most see them on a fairly regular basis.

The interaction between the young and the old extends far beyond regular visits, however. The 65-plus make it clear that they perform some valuable functions for the younger generation: Giving gifts (90%); helping out when someone is ill (68%); taking care of grandchildren (54%); helping out with money (45%); giving advice on how to deal with some of life's problems (39%); shopping or running errands (34%); fixing things around the house or keeping house for them (26%); giving advice on rearing children (23%) or on jobs or business matters (20%) and taking grandchildren, nieces or nephews into their homes (16%).

Though all ages and economic groups help in some ways, the level of service is higher for the 65-69 group than for those 80 and over; the more affluent give gifts, help out with money and advice on business matters more frequently; the less affluent are more involved in giving advice on rearing children, particularly older blacks, who are also much more likely to take grandchildren, nieces or nephews into their homes.

Agree in Many Areas of Help

The group under 65 agreed, in like percentages in four areas, that parents and grandparents over 65 assist with gifts, shopping or running errands, fixing things around the house or keeping house and taking children into their homes. In three areas, the younger generation credit the older with less assistance than parents and grandparents say they give: Helping out when someone is ill, taking care of grandchildren and helping out with money.

In giving advice, however, the younger generation reports their parents or grandparents give far more advice than the older generation feels they do.

In economic terms, the contribution that older people make to younger members of their families is substantial. Besides gifts and money, the services performed by older people for their children and grandchildren represent substantial monetary savings. As nurses for the ill, as babysitters for small children, as shoppers and errand runners, as home repairers and housekeepers or as surrogate parents, the older Americans offer assistance to children and grandchildren that would cost dearly otherwise.

Without the free services of older family members, the younger ones would either have to hire outside help or, more likely for many, sacrifice income by taking off from work themselves to perform these same tasks. Older people play a critical, even indispensable role in the lives of their children or grandchildren that may be largely taken for granted.

Gainful Employment of People 65 and Over

The economic contributions of older Americans is in no way limited to the family level: 2.5 million 65 and over provide paid service (3% full-time, 9% part-time). An additional 6% is part of the labor force but currently unemployed; another 17% identify themselves as housewives.

Employment rates are much higher for those 65-69 (4% full-time, 14% part-time) than the 70 and over and higher among men than women (17% to 9%). An equal number (12%) of blacks and whites 65 and over are employed.

At the time of this survey, the rate of those 55-64 reporting they were employed was high (38% full-time, 10% part-time); however, so was the unemployment rate (10%), suggesting that people in their late fifties and early sixties were having serious difficulties in finding work even before the recent recessionary period.

It is likely that many of these unemployed, when they reach 65 or so, give up looking for a job and consider themselves "retired." This would explain the drop-off in the retirement rate after 65 (6%).

The occupations in which those 65 and over continue to work full or part-time include managers, officials or proprietors (18%); service workers (17%); operatives or unskilled laborers (15%);

skilled craftsmen or foremen (11%); professionals and sales workers (each 10%); clerical workers and farmers (each 8%).

Occupation A Factor

Judging by the retirement rate, one occupation stands out from the rest as having far less room for older employees: A full 22% of retired people were skilled craftsmen or foremen while they worked. The occupational distribution of three age groups, 18-54, 55-64 and 65 and over, show that besides skilled craftsmen or foremen, professionals and clerical workers have a lower representation of older workers than young. More old people than young are employed as managers, officials or proprietors, sales or service workers and farmers. Though people 65 and over do compete for and hold jobs in all categories, those occupational categories where part-time work is possible become increasingly important with age.

The potential manpower among older Americans appears to extend far beyond those who are currently employed; the survey shows substantial numbers of those retired or unemployed would welcome the opportunity to work. Among those of the older public who are retired (63%), the equivalent of 4.4 million (37%) say they did not retire by choice; almost half of older retired men with incomes under $3,000 and half of the retired blacks reported mandatory retirement.

While poor health was volunteered as the major obstacle keeping those who would like to work from actually working, other reasons were reported: Too old (28%); no work available (15%); other interests (8%); would lose Social Security or pension benefits (4%); lack of transportation (2%).

Though a comparative few blamed their unemployment on no work available, additional probing revealed that many more would consider working if asked back to their old jobs or offered new, suitable employment. It is reasonable to assume from these results that reasons given for not working are learned reponses to cover up for the fact that "nobody wants me." In short, with over four million older unemployed or retired individuals who want to work, there exists a massive untapped source of manpower.

Feel Skills Unused

20 Not only would many older Americans like to work who are not currently doing so, one in 10 of those 65 and over feel they have specific skills which no one gives them a chance to use. This feeling exists not only among the retired; a like number of those still employed feel they have unused skills. However, this is not a problem exclusive to older Americans; many others in our society feel they have no chance to use present skills or would like the chance to learn new ones.

In the 65-plus group, both working and retired persons (44%) expressed interest in participating in a job training program or learning new skills. In the preretirement age group 55-64, a high percentage are interested in job training.

Neither the government nor the private sector aims job training efforts where this survey demonstrates the demand: For people in the preretirement and retirement years. With forced retirement and lack of job opportunities, preparation for an occupation in demand may provide the chance to work or the possibility of change and advancement. As older people are deprived of the opportunity to work, society is deprived of the energies and talents of many capable older workers with great potential. □

Bright, Quick, Feisty: 'Pzazz' at 78

Harriet Sappington has pzazz. No question about that. She's bright and quick and feisty. You sort of know it by visual osmosis. Take another look at the cover art of this issue of *Perspective*. Can't you see impishness in those brown eyes? Doesn't the smile tell you something?

Something doubtless. But certainly not all. To begin with, Mrs. Sappington is two years on the sunny side of 80. She weighs 126 pounds, eats two meals a day and has all her own teeth. Her health is excellent. For a good portion of her long and active life she's yearned to be an actress. Years ago, when her former husband was in the navy and wanted out, she got him out by pretending to be urgently pregnant in a way that convinced everyone. It was a bravura.

Spotlight Affords Luxurious Warmth

Earlier, when she was the only American girl in Vera Cruz, Mexico, and a belle among the Mexican *solderos*, the would-be star of stage and screen learned how comfortable it was to bask in the spotlight of attention. She luxuriated in the warmth, so nurtured by it that she was later to seek more on a professional level in Hollywood. Stardom eluded her, though a lengthy illness did not, and ultimately she returned to the east coast. What then? The real estate business, it turned out.

Mrs. Sappington was a successful real estate agent. She was also a success at raising three children, all married now, after divorcing her husband. And that, you might think, would be it. A pleasant capsule of a life story with a pleasant ending about a perky lady of 78 who lives in a Manhattan apartment building. Success without the neon lights.

Perhaps if nostalgia had not assailed her six years ago, there would be no more. She went back to Vera Cruz for a visit and to please a friend agreed to pose for the cover of a record album, "Always Sweethearts." She was the "sweetheart" grown older.

Start of New Career Is Signaled

The modeling job signaled the start of a new career. She was hooked. Why not other assignments? It was the next best thing to being an actress. Back to New York, to the closet for an array of costume changes, to the mirror for changes in makeup, to the photographer (one of her grandsons) for a series of photos depicting different characters. Then to the television and modeling agents to sell herself. It worked. She caught on almost at once. The first

break was a Pepperidge Farm ad that ran in Life magazine. Since then there've been many additional jobs as a model in newspaper, magazine and television advertisements. She's also had small parts in television soap operas and played minor character roles in films shot on location in New York.

Mrs. Sappington says the business is not without flaw. She can live on the income from tv commercial residuals (so much for as long as they run) and resort to unemployment compensation when they run out and other work is scarce. Like any performer, she must anticipate the lean times, stay close to the telephone for calls to work — and initiate calls to generate interest in hiring her. The competition is heavy. She is one of 10 older models ("all of them awfully good friends") in New York who rank high on the popularity scale with agents, and often any one of them can be chosen for a given job. It isn't always she, though the care given to preparing for each audition is as painstaking as if she were about to step on the Broadway stage.

Costumes, Jewelry Are Accessible

For example: The portrayal of an 1890 "rocking chair" type older person means a wrinkled face (makeup applied), an abundance of lace (extracted from bureau drawers), a long dress and possibly high button shoes (a foraged closet). For the cover picture on this magazine, Mrs. Sappington had the jewelry literally at her fingertips ("I wear gobs of it, anyhow") and the shawls ("I've lived like a gypsy and have so many of them"). In these two cases, the rest was easy. She landed the jobs.

But when it isn't so easy, when someone else wins out, the lean periods have to be coped with. Mrs. Sappington has been approached by a publishing house to write a book about her life. So for now that's how she copes, writing a chapter or two at a time. "The title is 'Everybody's Doing It' — growing up a little more each day, not just growing older," she says with a lilt in her voice.

The book's destiny is unknown. It could be a best seller, a highly personalized and humorous account of what it's like for the author to "grow up a little more each day." As for the writer/model/actress, her plan is to go on indirectly touching the lives of thousands of Americans through media appearances. Success continues without the neon lights . . . for the moment. **...Mary Youry**

Public Policy Report

by Daniel A. Quirk *NCOA Public Policy Consultant*

Older Americans Act Extension Passes House

On April 8, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 3922, a bill to extend and strengthen programs authorized under the Older Americans Act of 1965, by an overwhelming vote of 377-19. Hearings were held on the extension by the Subcommittee on Select Education in late January and early February. NCOA's statement to the subcommittee was summarized in the last issue of *Perspective on Aging*. By a vote of 13 to 1, the subcommittee reported H.R. 3922 on March 6 to the Committee on Education and Labor; in turn it reported the bill to the full House on a unanimous (36-0) vote. Only minor technical changes were made in the bill after it reached the House floor.

The bill contains the following major provisions:

- A four-year extension (through fiscal 1979) of the program of grants to states for community services (Title III). Authorizations: FY'76-$180 million; FY'77-$231 million; FY'78-$287.2 million; and FY'79-$349.64 million.
- A two-year extension (through FY'79) of the Elderly Nutrition Program (Title VII), which also provides for additional distribution of commodities. Authorizations: FY'78-$275 million; FY'79-$300 million.
- A four-year extension (through FY'79) of the Older American Community Service Employment Act (Title IX). Authorizations: FY'76-$100 million; FY'77-$150 million; FY'78-$200 million; FY'79-$250 million.
- A three-year extension (through FY-79) of the national Older American Service Programs which will still be administered by ACTION. Authorizations: For RSVP, FY'77-$24 million; FY'78-$28.8 million; FY'79-$34.56 million; for Foster Grandparents, FY'77-$38.4 million; FY'78-$46.08 million; FY'79-$55.296 million. For other ACTION programs for older Americans, FY'77-$9.6 million; FY'78-$11.52 million and FY'79-$13.824 million.
- Establishment of a new Special Service Program for the Elderly with emphasis on homemaker and other home services, counseling (including legal services for nursing home patients), residential repairs and renovation, and transportation. At least 20 percent of Title III funds must be used for these services.
- A prohibition against age discrimination in Federal programs or activities. This would not apply to special emphasis programs developed to meet the needs of a particular age group.
- A provision for direct funding of service programs for Indian tribes.
- A continuation of the Title IV Research, Training and Multidisciplinary Centers of Gerontology programs through Fiscal Year 1979 with no specific authorization of funds. Funding under this title would also authorize the training of lawyers, lay advocates and paraprofessionals to a) provide legal counseling and b) monitor programs serving the elderly.
- A continuation of Title V, the Multipurpose Senior Centers program through Fiscal Year 1979 with no specific authorization of funds.

The total expenditures authorized under this four-year extension amount to $2.5 billion.

April 16 and 17, the Subcommittee on Aging of the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee will hold hearings on extension of the Older Americans Act and NCOA will again present its views.

NCOA Testifies on the Proposed 1976 Budget

On March 12, NCOA Executive Director Jack Ossofsky appeared before the new Senate Budget Committee to present a statement on the proposed Federal budget for FY'76. It urged the Congress to disapprove Administration rescissions in the FY'75 budget for the Older Americans Act and to reallocate Federal funds in the proposed FY'76 budget to more adequately meet the needs of the nation's older citizens.

Ossofsky characterized the Administration's proposed cutbacks in aging programs as morally indefensible, counterproductive and economically unjustifiable. NCOA called Congress to develop "an affirmative program which does not just recognize the economic hardships of the elderly but views them as an integral part of the solution of our economic ills." The statement focused on developing construction and service programs in housing, health, employment and social services which aid the elderly and create jobs and stimulate the economy. Ossofsky concluded:

We must not fool ourselves into thinking that budget cuts which eliminate or reduce essential

services will solve the nation's economic problems. On the contrary, in the long run they will wreak havoc in budgets at all governmental levels. The Congress should seek, instead, to revitalize the economy by developing programs which create jobs while also alleviating the social and economic ills of the older population.

Congress Acts to Save Title IX Employment Program

On January 30, President Ford proposed rescission of the entire FY'75 appropriation for Title IX of the Older Americans Act, the Community Service Employment Act. The President's proposed FY'76 budget does not request funds for this program. Also, national contractors have been told that the Operation Mainstream program for older workers will expire on June 30, 1975. Under current funding levels, these two programs can provide more than 12,000 part-time jobs for low-income people aged 55 and over.

The House Appropriations Committee recently reported legislation disallowing the entire $12 million rescission request. The Emergency Employment Appropriations Act includes an additional $24 million, a total of $36 million for FY'75. The House passed that bill on March 12. Senator Magnusen (Wash.), chairman of the Senate Labor-HEW Appropriations Subcommittee, is expected to seek an increase to $48 million for Title IX in FY'75.

In related action, Senators Kennedy, Eagleton and Church introduced legislation to amend Title IX. That bill (S. 962) would continue the role of national contractors and authorize $100 million in FY'76, $150 million in FY'77 and $200 million in FY'78; with an estimated 190,000 part-time jobs to be created over the next three fiscal years. Senator Eagleton's Subcommittee on Aging of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare held hearings March 19 on the bill.

Presenting NCOA's prepared statement at those hearings, Ossofsky concluded that the major provisions of S. 962 would accomplish much of what needs to be done in this area. NCOA shared with the subcommittee its experiences with the program and presented research demonstrating the growing need for an expanded public service employment program for older workers.

NCOA recommended that the Title IX program should be a permanent, categorical manpower program for older persons aged 55 and over, and was supportive of the legislative language in S. 962 which would not allow Title IX to be absorbed under special manpower revenue sharing. Although NCOA supported a continuing role for national contractors in the administration of that program, we urged the committee to reorient that role. Ossofsky commented:

Title IX funds should serve as seed money—to develop and initially administer such a program in a local community, prove its worth to older people and to the community; and, finally, encourage prime sponsors to assume responsibility for that program. This process would be repeated in other communities across the nation through a continuing Title IX program.

Further action on the bill is not expected until the committee holds hearings on extension of the full Older Americans Act, set for April 16 and 17.

In Brief

The Senior Opportunity and Services program (SOS), Emergency Food and Medical Services and the State Economic Opportunity Offices program have all been extended through June 30, 1975 (under P.L. 94-7). They had been scheduled for termination on March 31. The continuing resolution which extended them also provides an additional $2.5 million for SOS in the final quarter of FY'75.

Despite the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) announcement in January that it intends to implement the Section 202 housing program for the elderly, regulations have not been released. Section 202 loans are to be available to finance the construction of rental housing for the elderly and the handicapped. Those projects must be sponsored by nonprofit organizations and assisted under Section 8 Housing Assistance Payments Program. On April 4, representatives of the Elderly Housing Coalition, of which NCOA is a member, met with new HUD Secretary Carla Hills. They urged speedy implementation of the 202 program with adequate time to respond to proposed regulations.

The Tax Reduction Act, signed into law (P.L. 94-12) reluctantly by President Ford, provides a one-shot $50 payment ($100 for couples) to Social Security, Railroad Retirement and SSI beneficiaries. That payment is nontaxable and must be disregarded in determining eligibility under any state or Federal public assistance program. The Department of Agriculture's announcement that these payments would be included in determination of eligibility for Food Stamps was in error and has since been rescinded.

The Senate Finance Subcommittee on Revenue Sharing, chaired by Senator William Hathaway (Maine), has scheduled oversight hearings on the program for April 16 and 17, 1975. Other subcommittee members include Senators Gaylord Nelson (Wisc.), Vance Hartke (Ind.), Robert Packwood (Ore.) and William Brock (Tenn.). Hearings will focus on the ways in which state and local governments have utilized revenue-sharing funds.

Regulations for Title XX (P.L. 93-647, the Social Service Amendments of 1974) have not yet been released. They are expected to be announced in mid-April, and a summary will appear in this column as soon as possible.

Representatives Gilbert Gude (Md.) and Theodore Risenhoover (Okla.) have been added to the new House Select Committee on Aging.

'Myth and Reality' in Book Form Available from NCOA

This issue of PERSPECTIVE ON AGING contains only highlights of "The Myth and Reality of Aging in America," which is an extensive, 245-page report including charts, figures and detailed analysis of the Louis Harris survey results. The full report is now available in volume form — priced at $15.00 a copy for NCOA members and $20.00 a copy for nonmembers. Send your request for it (with check enclosed) to:

Publications Department — Survey
The National Council on the Aging, Inc.
1828 L Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

A series of monographs and other publications based on the survey are in the planning stage, with announcement of their availability to be made at an early date.